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## REMARKS ON THE BIRDS OF ANTICOSTI ISLAND

BY HARRISON F. LEWIS

SINCE my first visit to Anticosti Island, Quebec, in June, 1922, I have returned to that island from time to time. In a published paper (Lewis, 1924) all records of the birds of Anticosti that were then available were brought together and evaluated. My subsequent observations of the birds of that island that seemed worth recording have appeared in an irregular series of brief notes (Lewis, 1925, 1926, 1927, 1938a, 1938b). This series of publications is continued in the present paper, the first part of which consists of records based on observations that I made on and near Anticosti during the week of June 5 to 11, 1940. The

Figure 1. A section of the nesting colony of Kittiwakes at Gullcliff Bay. (National Museum of Canada photograph.)

second part of this paper is concerned with another recent publication on the birds of that island (Braund and McCullagh, 1940).

I arrived at Port Menier, near the west end of Anticosti, on June 5, 1940. On June 7, through arrangements kindly made by Mr. H. E. Graham, Resident Manager of the island, I left Port Menier in a small motorboat for a cruise along the island's north shore, to East Point and return, for the purpose of observing the seabird colonies situated on that coast. This motorboat was the property of the Consolidated Paper Corporation, which owns Anticosti, and was in regular use for patrols and local transport around the island. It was operated by three of the Corporation's employes, chief of whom was the Skipper, Charles McCormick. These men had had many years of experience in navigating small boats around Anticosti and knew the coast in great detail. East Point was reached on June 9 and the return to Port Menier was completed on June 10. Early on the morning of June 12 I left Anticosti.

To the Consolidated Paper Corporation, to Mr. Graham, and to Skipper McCormick and his crew I express my sincere thanks and appreciation for their valuable co-operation and assistance.

Certain observations made during this visit to Anticosti are presented hereunder, arranged according to the species of birds to which they have reference. Three species that are here recorded from Anticosti for the first time are marked in this list with an asterisk.

*Moris bassana.* Gannet.—On June 9, beginning at 5:30 A.M., I visited the nesting colony of Gannets and other seabirds at Gullcliff Bay, about 3 miles northwest of East Point. The sea was smooth, so our small motorboat could approach close to shore. At my request, the boat was made to pass slowly along and close to the precipitous cliff, 116 feet high, on which the birds were nesting. Whenever I desired it, the boat was stopped and permitted to drift idly for as long a time as necessary. Such a slow passage along the full extent of this great bird colony was made four times on this occasion. In this way I was able to make a very detailed examination of the colony and to determine with much accuracy the numbers of the Gannets.

The Gannets present were counted carefully during the first passage along the colony, when they were comparatively undisturbed, and were found to number 838. These were all either in fully adult plumage or in the plumage of the fourth year, characterized by a few black feathers scattered among the white. Birds in both of these plumages commonly breed. The Gannets' nests on the cliff were counted with equal care during later passages in front of the colony and were found to number 496. Nests of this species are comparatively easy to count in this colony because they are scattered on many small ledges. It is possible that a few of them were overlooked, for the morning was cloudy and the light was not strong, but it is believed that the number stated is substantially correct. Some observations were made, a little later, from

the top of the cliff, but it was found that many of the Gannets' nests could not be seen from that position.

The number of nests counted indicates a breeding population of 992 Gannets. The 838 Gannets that were present when the cliff was first examined, between 5:30 and 6:00 A.M., therefore constitute approximately 84 per cent of the total breeding population of the colony.

Later in the summer of 1940 Mr. John Osborne, who resided at Fox Bay, Anticosti, for many years and left there in 1907, told me that during his residence at Fox Bay no Gannets nested at Gullcliff Bay, which he was accustomed to visit frequently. As Captain Oscar Mercier stated (Lewis, 1924) that the Gannet colony at Gullcliff Bay had been seen by him in 1913 and subsequent years, it appears probable that this colony was founded between 1907 and 1913.

Since P. A. Taverner reported (1929) that this colony contained "about 500 nests" when seen by him in 1928, it does not appear to have increased since that time. It seems, indeed, unlikely that the Gannet population in this colony will increase much, unless the Gannets drive away European Cormorants and occupy their ledges, for most of the ledges big enough for these large species are already occupied by one or the other of them, while extension of the colony onto the open land back of the top of the cliff is presumably prevented by Anticosti's population of foxes, black bears, and white-tailed deer.

*Phalacrocorax carbo carbo.* European Cormorant.—The occupied nests of this species on Anticosti (on suitable coastal cliffs on the north shore of the island from Cape Observation to East Point) were carefully counted on June 8 and 9 and found to number 605, representing a breeding population of 1,210 birds. Greater detail concerning observations of this species is being published in another connection.

*Dafila acuta tzitzihoa.* American Pintail.—This species was observed only in a small wooded swamp near Port Menier, between the village and the principal group of farm buildings. On June 5, I found on a small pond in this swamp four Pintails, of which at least two were adult drakes. On June 11, while I was standing in full view near the same pond, a female Pintail, quacking repeatedly, deliberately flew in and alighted on it and then, jerking nervously, swam toward me. I remained quiet and after a while she flew away.

*Nettion carolinense.* Green-winged Teal.—On June 6 three drake Green-winged Teal were seen on the pond near Port Menier on which the Pintails had been seen on June 5.

*Nyroca (marila?).* (Greater?) Scaup Duck.—A number of pairs of Scaup Ducks seen near Port Menier on June 5, 6, and 11, are believed to have been Greater Scaups. The sides of the drakes were white, greenish gloss was repeatedly observed on the head of one drake and the broad band of white displayed on the wings when the birds were flying was seen to extend well out onto the primaries. These birds were

in the same locality in which I saw Scaup Ducks on June 10 and 14, 1922 (Lewis, 1924). The Scaups seen in June, 1940, occurred as follows:

June 5—Four pairs.

June 6—One pair.

June 11—Two pairs and one group of three drakes and a duck.

Sometimes the Scaups were seen on the small lake, officially named Gamache Lake but locally known as Lake St. George, that is close behind the village of Port Menier; sometimes they were in a small shallow pond, apparently of a temporary character, in a hayfield near the lake.

Active courtship on the part of one pair was observed through a 6x binocular on June 5, for about twenty minutes, at a distance of about 300 feet. The drake would dive close to the female and immediately come up again in another position close to her. Repeatedly, with head and neck outstretched, he rushed at her across the water, and on each such occasion she rushed equally fast away from him in a similar manner, but she did not leave him or attempt to fly away. I heard no notes uttered during these performances, but one drake, when flushed with his mate, cried *squarrow, squarrow* repeatedly, in a loud, hoarse, complaining voice, as he flew away. When, a few minutes later, this pair flew back to the pond where I had first seen them, the drake again uttered his cry a number of times.

*Melanitta deglandi.* White-winged Scoter.—

*Melanitta perspicillata.* Surf Scoter.—

*Oidemia americana.* American Scoter.—

During my voyages along the coast of Anticosti by motorboat, the vibration of the boat was often so great as to interfere seriously with the use of a binocular for detailed observation of birds at a distance. For this reason many of the scoters, other than White-winged Scoters, that were seen were not identified specifically. Because, however, of the inadequacy of available records of scoters at Anticosti, it seems advisable to set forth here all my records of these ducks in the vicinity of that island as observed during my visit in June, 1940.

June 5—West Point to Port Menier: White-winged Scoter, 100; other scoters (sp.?), 17.

June 7—Port Menier to West Point: White-winged Scoter, 17.
West Point to Cap de Rabast: scoters (sp.?), 650 (a few White-winged, the rest apparently mostly American).
Cap de Rabast to Brig Harbour: White-winged Scoter, 70; Surf Scoter, 6.
Brig Harbour to MacDonald River: scoters (sp.?), 7.

June 8—MacDonald River to Cape Observation: scoters (sp.?), 6.
Vauréal River to Salmon River: scoters (sp.?), 18.
Salmon River to Fox Bay: White-winged Scoter, 6; scoters (sp.?), 400.

June 9—Fox Bay to East Point: scoters (sp.?), 70.

*Bonasa umbellus.* Ruffed Grouse.—This species, originally introduced near Port Menier a few years before 1926, has now, I am told, spread throughout the entire wooded area of Anticosti. It is interesting that it has been able to do this in spite of the unusual abundance of foxes on this island.

In 1940, I flushed two Ruffed Grouse on Anticosti, one on June 7 at MacDonald River, and one on June 11 near Port Menier. Both of these birds had gray tails.

*Charadrius semipalmatus.* Semipalmated Plover.—Ninety were observed at Port Menier on June 5. As none was seen on Anticosti during the rest of my stay, it is probable that the observation recorded marks the termination of the spring migration of this species at this place.

*Lobipes lobatus.* Northern Phalarope.—As this is another species that has been very inadequately recorded in the vicinity of Anticosti, my observations of it there in 1940 are set forth in full.

June 7—West Point to Cap de Rabast: a flock of 130 and a flock of 80.

Figure 2. Kittiwake nests at Gullcliff Bay. (National Museum of Canada photograph.)

June 10—East of Brig Harbour and within 5 miles of that place: a flock of 300, one of 50, one of 30.

Cap de Rabast: a flock of 5.

*Rissa tridactyla tridactyla.* Atlantic Kittiwake.—During my close and repeated examination of the seabird colony at Gullcliff Bay on June 9, I estimated the Kittiwake population of the cliff, section by section. The final conclusion reached is that, as well as I could judge, the total number of Kittiwakes then present was about 9,200, the total number of occupied Kittiwake nests was about 7,500, and the total number of Kittiwakes nesting in this colony was therefore about 15,000. As these estimates were made in the early morning, it appears reasonable and in accord with them that many of the Kittiwakes of the colony should be absent at that hour in search of food.

On a cliff at East Point, which was also visited on June 9, is a colony of Kittiwakes that was estimated to contain about 500 breeding birds.

*Sterna* (sp.). Tern.—Near the mouth of the Salmon River, on June 8, five terns, either Common Terns or Arctic Terns, but believed to be the former, were observed on small hummocks that formed little islets in a pond in a bog. The terns acted as if they were nesting there or intended to nest there. The only reason for mentioning this observation here is that two of these birds were seen perched on trees. One was perched on the slender, swaying top of a small tamarack (*Larix laricina*) that grew on one hummock; another was perched on the somewhat stiffer top of a small spruce tree (*Picea* sp.) on a neighboring hummock. I do not know of any other instance of Common or Arctic Terns perching on trees.

*Uria aalge aalge.* Atlantic Murre.—A few small groups of this species were seen incubating, on June 9, on some of the broader ledges of the cliff at Gullcliff Bay. I estimated the total number of Atlantic Murres in this colony to be about 220.

*Tyrannus tyrannus.* Eastern Kingbird.—At Fox Bay on June 8 I plainly saw a Kingbird on two occasions, about 2½ hours apart. This bird was frequenting rotting kelp on the beach, doubtless to obtain small flying insects.

On June 11, I saw two Kingbirds together near the farm at Port Menier. This suggests the possibility of their nesting there.

There are previous records of four Kingbirds on Anticosti.

*Hirundo erythrogaster.* Barn Swallow.—On June 11, I saw a pair of Barn Swallows resting on a wire at L'Anse aux Fraises, or Strawberry Cove, where I saw a pair of this species on July 16, 1938 (Lewis, 1938b).

Later on June 11, 1940, Mr. Ted McCormick, a resident of Port Menier, showed to me, in a large barn at that place, a clearly recognizable nest of the Barn Swallow. He said that this nest was built in

1939. There were no Barn Swallows in its vicinity at the time when I saw it.

*Petrochelidon albifrons albifrons.* Northern Cliff Swallow.—On June 5 and again on June 11 I saw one Cliff Swallow flying about near Port Menier.

Mr. Ted McCormick, of Port Menier, told me that several pairs of Cliff Swallows nested in 1939 under the eaves of one of the barns at that place. I did not see any actual evidence of such nesting.

*Regulus satrapa satrapa.* Eastern Golden-crowned Kinglet.—One singing male was observed between Port Menier and L'Anse aux Fraises on June 11.

*Bombycilla cedrorum.* Cedar Waxwing.—I saw three birds of this species at Port Menier on June 11.

**Sturnus vulgaris vulgaris.* Starling.—In mixed woods beside the little-used Canard Road, about 2 miles southeast of Port Menier, I obtained excellent observations of two Starlings, a short distance apart, on June 5. One of these birds remained near a dead birch stub, which was about 10 inches in diameter and was marked, between 20 and 25 feet from the ground, with four old holes apparently made by Downy Woodpeckers. This Starling scolded me angrily for some time, suggesting that it may have been nesting in one of those holes.

This is the first record of the Starling on Anticosti. I was much surprised to discover it in little-frequented woodland, rather than in the village of Port Menier.

**Vireo philadelphicus.* Philadelphia Vireo.—On the morning of June 8, in poplar woods on a low ridge near the mouth of the Vauréal River, I found a Philadelphia Vireo, singing steadily. It was clearly seen at close range through a 6x binocular, its characteristic markings were noted with care, and its identity was established with certainty. I timed the rate of its singing and found that it was uttering 33 song-phrases per minute. On the morning of June 10 a Philadelphia Vireo, presumably the same individual, was heard singing on the same ridge. This species has not previously been recorded from Anticosti.

*Vermivora ruficapilla ruficapilla.* Nashville Warbler.—A singing male was observed at Fox Bay on June 8 and two singing males were observed near Port Menier on June 11. Previously this species had been recorded on Anticosti only on June 13, 1922, at Port Menier (Lewis, 1924).

**Dendroica tigrina.* Cape May Warbler.—On the morning of June 10, in mixed woods near the mouth of MacDonald River, a male of this species was singing repeatedly. Recognizing its song, I followed it about for some time and eventually succeeded in seeing it in the clear morning sunshine and identified it by sight as well as by sound. This is the first record of this warbler on Anticosti.

*Melospiza lincolni lincolni.* Lincoln's Sparrow.—Two individuals were heard singing at Port Menier on June 5.

* * * *

I now turn with reluctance to the task of offering some critical comment on certain aspects of a recent paper on the birds of Anticosti (Braund and McCullagh, 1940).

Included in this paper are some quotations, attributed to previous publications, that are related to the matter in hand very distantly or not at all. Even though we grant that in a list of the birds of Anticosti there may be some possible reason for quoting from the "Catalogue of Canadian Birds" (Macoun and Macoun, 1909) a statement that the Razor-billed Auk "breeds, but not in large numbers, on the Great Bird rock, Bryon island, and Entry island, Magdalen islands, Gulf of St. Lawrence," there does not seem to be any occasion for including in such a list the following remarks about the American Eider:

"Lewis (1930) writes, 'large batch of American Eiders observed along south shore of Labrador Peninsula in 1929.' Townsend (1916) translating Beetz's notes writes, 'American eiders have been in the habit of nesting on the isles of the Gulf'."

These quotations do not refer to Anticosti and add nothing to our knowledge of the status of the Eider there. Incidentally, the statement cited from a paper by the present writer, though presented as a direct quotation, is not to be found at the place referred to, where the remarks made are: "This species prospered along the south shore of the Labrador Peninsula in 1929. The hatch of young Eiders was a large one . . ."

Perhaps the most remarkably inapposite of the quotations published in the Anticosti bird list under discussion is the following, which is included in the paragraph about the Eastern Goldfinch:

"Henry Mousley (1932) found this species common on August 23, near St. Lambert, Quebec, and states that many nest."

St. Lambert is a suburb of Montreal, in the Transition Zone, more than 500 miles from Anticosti, which is partly in the Canadian Zone and partly in the Hudsonian Zone. What the status of the Goldfinch at St. Lambert has to do with its status on Anticosti is a mystery. Mr. Mousley, in numerous papers, has published a great deal of detailed information about the birds of southern Quebec. Why his passing comment, at the place cited, that "On this day (August 23, 1931) I was out with my friend Mr. Terrill near St. Lambert when we saw many nests of the eastern Goldfinch (*Spinus tristis*) . . ." should be chosen for reference in a list of the birds of Anticosti, while all his other published records of the birds of southern Quebec, in this paper and others, are very properly omitted from that list, is a mystery even deeper than the first.

Such references in this paper cannot fail to make the reader wonder how the search of the literature incident to its preparation was carried on.

Under the name "*Hylocichla ustulata almae* Oberholser. Alma's

Thrush" these authors state, in part, "One of the most interesting discoveries arising from the study of our collection was that the Olive-back Thrush of Anticosti Island belongs to the Rocky Mountain race. . . . It will be interesting to see whether examination of specimens of *Hylocichla ustulata* from northern Ontario and Quebec will show that *H. u. almae* has an unbroken range across northern North America, from the Rocky Mountains to the Gulf of St. Lawrence."

Under the name "*Melospiza georgiana ericrypta* Oberholser. Western Swamp Sparrow" they state, in part, "The discovery that the breeding Swamp Sparrows of Anticosti Island are *Melospiza georgiana ericrypta* Oberholser (1938) extends the range of that supposedly western form from the prairie region of Canada to the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and is one more example of the discovery in northeastern America of subspecies first described from the west. It still remains to be demonstrated, however, that the ranges of these western forms across Canada to the Atlantic Coast are continuous."

*Hylocichla ustulata almae* and *Melospiza georgiana ericrypta* are names not to be found in any edition of the A.O.U. Check-List. The latter name, having been proposed in 1938, was not available when the Check-List was published, but the former, which was proposed in 1898, was presumably considered and rejected by the Committees that prepared the Third (1910) and Fourth (1931) Editions of the Check-List. As far as the mere question of use, in a faunal list, of names in such categories is concerned, some will consider it undesirable, yet it may be justified as an exercise of that liberty in science properly pertaining to the publishers of carefully-formed opinions.

To assume and state, without further evidence, that the representatives of *Hylocichla ustulata* and *Melospiza georgiana* that inhabit Anticosti Island, in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, belong, respectively, to races of those species whose known range had previously been restricted to distant regions is, however, a very different matter. It brings into question the fundamental concept of the subspecies.

Before the general acceptance of an evolutionary view of living creatures, it was customary to classify them, for practical convenience, like artifacts, on a basis of physical similarity. The resulting "systems" differed so basically in their aim and form from those accepted at present that they have become mere historical curiosities.

Modern classification is arranged to serve the primary purpose of expressing *genetic relationship,* as far as that has been ascertained or rationally inferred. Morphological features are still utilized in arranging our classifications, but are properly so utilized only as indications, albeit often the principal ones available, of what the genetic relationships actually are.

A subspecies, then, is not essentially a group of conspecific individuals that possess in common certain morphological distinctions, but

is a group of conspecific individuals that possess among themselves a *common genetic relationship* that:

(1) relates them to one another more closely than to individuals in any other group within their species;

(2) is indicated by the presence, in most of the individuals concerned, of the heritable morphological distinctions that accompany it;

(3) is made to appear more probable by auxiliary evidence, such as appropriate spatial or geographical occurrence.

It follows that, to determine the subspecific position of an individual specimen or of a number of specimens, it is not sufficient to set up, as it were, a series of sieves calculated to sort out morphological characteristics, and to pass our specimen or specimens through them and conclude that any specimen corresponding to sieve "A" is, by that very fact, subspecies "a"; any specimen corresponding to sieve "B" is subspecies "b," and so on. It is also necessary to present at least a reasonable likelihood that the morphologically similar specimens do possess among themselves a genetic relationship closer than that existing between them and any other similarly differentiated group. This likelihood is commonly indicated in practice by the fact that the specimens possessing the morphological distinctions in question have been obtained from an ascertainable unbroken range.

When specimens with identical or closely similar morphological characteristics of subspecific value are found in different ranges, not known to be connected, and known to be separated, in the region directly intervening, by a different subspecies of the same species, this fact renders it doubtful if they possess that close genetic interrelationship that alone would constitute them members of one subspecies. Subsequent investigations may reveal that, by some indirect route, what originally appeared as two distinct ranges are actually joined as portions of one unbroken range, but, until that has been shown, it is the part of proper scientific caution to refrain from stating that such morphologically similar but geographically separated populations are of one and the same subspecies.

The fact that the Swamp Sparrows of Anticosti Island may be found to be morphologically indistinguishable from those of Manitoba, more than 1,300 miles away, does not constitute them all one subspecies if the intervening breeding-grounds of this species are occupied by individuals that form a different subspecies. Such a situation indicates that it is quite probable that the Anticosti Swamp Sparrows and the Western Swamp Sparrows evolved independently from a common stock to subspecific status and have not since interbred. If that be actually the case, they are not one subspecies, but two, even though they be morphologically identical.

Practical convenience has no standing as a pleader on this question. It would doubtless make matters much simpler for the systematist to

deal only with the present measurable morphological features of living creatures, but the day for such simple science has passed. Now that the main object of our classification is not the convenience of the scientist but is the expression of genetic relationships developed in the course of the evolution of living things, we are not justified in omitting consideration of any available evidence that, in the light of present knowledge, assists in indicating those relationships. This evidence seldom is restricted to the morphological and usually includes the geographical.

These views are not new, but the statements quoted from the paper under discussion indicate that there is need to emphasize them again. An able commentary on the subject by the late Dr. Joseph Grinnell is cited below (Grinnell, 1918).

## Summary

Notes of special interest concerning the occurrence on Anticosti Island, Quebec, of 24 of the bird species observed there by the author during the period June 5 to 12, 1940, are presented.

*Sturnus vulgaris vulgaris, Vireo philadelphicus,* and *Dendroica tigrina* are recorded from Anticosti for the first time.

Certain features of a recent paper on the birds of Anticosti Island (Braund and McCullagh, 1940) are discussed. Objection is taken to the unsupported assumption of the subspecific identity of conspecific populations possessing close morphological similarity but occurring on ranges widely separated by the range of a different subspecies.

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